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Service Learning Bill Goes to the Governor

JEFFERSON CITY – The General Assembly has passed a bill urging Missouri schools to participate in service-learning programs and projects. During committee hearings in both the House and Senate, state education leaders testified in favor of Senate Bill 945.

“By engaging youth in service-learning, we are teaching them to become well-rounded citizens by applying critical thinking skills they will use far beyond graduation,” said Senator Michael R. Gibbons (R-Kirkwood), sponsor of the bill.

The bill directs the State Board of Education to assist school districts’ service learning programs at any grade level.

During the 2003-2004 school year, only 34 of Missouri’s public school districts received service-learning grants. Locally developed and operated service-learning programs need minimal support from the state level. Under this measure, Senator Gibbons and the legislature request that the State Board of Education assist with finding funds for school districts to adopt service-learning programs or projects.

“Schools with service-learning have reported a more positive school climate and greater connectedness,” Gibbons said. “The programs can help educate outside of the classroom and through creative projects.”

Service-learning programs do not create new classes under this bill, but rather a way of expanding what students are finding in their textbooks through service projects.

“Service learning is such a powerful teaching tool,” said Jan Schuster, service-learning coordinator for the Kirkwood School District. “We are so glad to have the support of the state. The passage of this legislation will do a lot to promote and sustain service-learning in years to come.”

Sen. Gibbons currently serves as Majority Floor Leader in the Senate.

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